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NEWS

Statement of Interest approved for the Muraco School, but what happens in the meantime?

CHRIS STEVENS | CORRESPONDENT

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Parents ask school officials to consider remedial work for Muraco before building is approved for state assistance. FILE PHOTO

A big step toward a possible new Muraco school building was tak
the School Committee voted April 10 to submit a Statement of Int

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the state's School Building Authority.

"I'm absolutely thrilled, as someone who lives in the Muraco neighborhood, to have this moving forward," said School Committee member Tim Matthews. "This is just a wonderful thing for the community."

While the Statement of Interest (SOI), if accepted, puts the district in the running for state funding, a new Muraco would be, best case scenario, five years away from fruition. So parents want to know what the town is going to do about building inadequacies in the meantime.

"We are very glad to hear that the Muraco building will be rebuilt in the coming years ... but we are here today to inform you of the really atrocious conditions that our children, teachers and administrative staff are dealing with every day," said Sara Yablon-Smith earlier in the week in a statement to the Select Board.

Yablon-Smith said some rooms are incredibly hot while others are freezing, sinks don't work, windows either don't open or can't be closed and the rug is dirty, stained and moldy.

"The roof is leaking onto the ceilings and walls and the mice are present as often as the children," she stated. "This is not a healthy and safe environment for our children, nor is it worthy of our incredible Muraco staff."

During the same meeting, Joanna Shea O'Brien said that over the last five years, she has said at every meeting and only half jokingly, that whoever is making financial decisions about the Muraco school should make them while sitting on a 15-year-old rug that's held down with duct tape on the floor of a Muraco classroom while a mouse traipses across the ro

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O'Brien said electrical outlets are out-of-date, the stage has become the copier and supply center and should they need it for a stage, the custodian has to clear away the storage shelves, copier and supplies and set up the risers.

She also praised the staff for making due for years without complaint. She said she understands that town officials don't want to make the school look too good or the SOI might not be approved. But she is also sure, "the leaders here that we have elected are highly capable of working together to remedy this situation."

Parents also took to the microphone at the School Committee meeting prior to the approval of the SOI.

Sandy George, president of the Muraco Elementary School Parents Association (MESPA), highlighted several "urgent actions." They included resolving electrical issues so the staff could run the microwave at lunch or plug in a laptop without blowing a circuit, rodent control, carpet replacement, paint and basic maintenance.

A survey MESPA conducted among staffers also threw the spotlight on moldy sinks, broken blinds, library temps that reach 80 plus-degrees due to a non-functioning air conditioner and other duct taped fixes that need permanent solutions, George said.

George added they are working on a room-by-room list of concerns they would get to the School Committee.

Alyssa Loring Tirella said she was thankful for the work on the SO reality is the building needs a lot of work in the interim.

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“It’s not going to get exponentially better over the next five years,” she said.

Adding to the concerns laid out by George the others, Tirella said they have portable classrooms, installed in 2008, that are nearing the end of their lives, there is no sprinkler system but they do have many of the original 1960s single pane windows and there extensive cracks in the foundation.

“We’re in a place where we need to decide what we can fix so the building doesn't fall down around our kids while we wait for a new construction project to start,” she said.

Former School Committee member Chris Nixon, who serves on the Educational Facilities Planning and Building Committee, said he understood the parents' frustration, but assured them the school “is not going to fall down around students.”

He said the concerns he’s hearing are the same ones that were there when he was a Muraco School parent, but there is limited funding. And something that seems as simple as putting in new carpeting simply isn’t.

Superintendent Dr. Frank Hackett agreed. He said they have to assume there are asbestos tiles under the carpet, which means replacing it could cost upwards of $20,000-$25,000 per room. He said they also need to speak with the principal and staff because replacing the carpet may not be the biggest priority.

Hackett said at some point they will have a better handle on what funding for Muraco projects might look like. He said he and Andrew Marron, director of Finance and Operations, had in fact already met with the town manager and that the Select Board was taking the issue very seriously.

Hacket said he wanted to thank Nixon for doing yeoman’s work o
as well as the School Committee. He said it was in February 2024 when

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they took a public vote committing to the intention of submitting an SOI.

“So this is a milestone,” he said.

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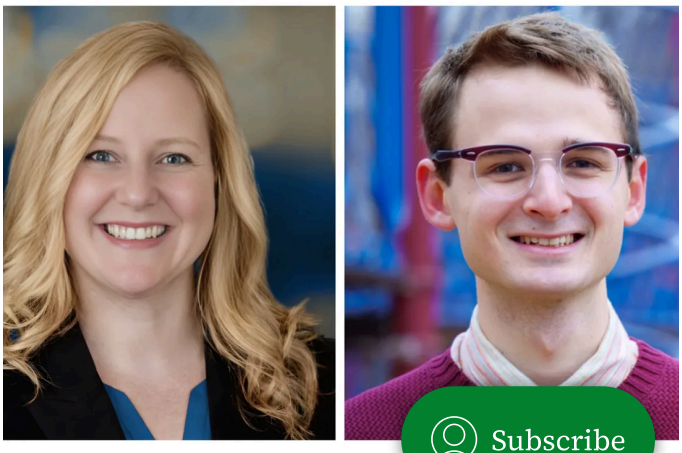

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'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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